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February 18, 1981

MEMORANDUM TO: CA - Ambassador Diego C. Asencio

FROM: CA/OCS - Louis P. Goelz

SUBJECT: The Disappearance of John J. Sullivan in El Salvador

BACKGROUND

You will be meeting with members of the Sullivan family and Congresswoman Roukema (R-N.J.) and/or her Administrative Assistant, Dan Yeager, on February 18 at 11:00 a.m. to discuss the disappearance of their son, John J. Sullivan, in El Salvador. Jim Ward will attend as well as Mike Barry from from the Desk. The attached letter to Congresswoman Roukema dated February 2 sets forth the actions taken to date by the U.S. Embassy and the local authorities in San Salvador to locate Mr. Sullivan (Tab 1). On February 12, the Embassy reported the body of a young man had been found on the beach. Pictures are on the way, but Embassy staff do not believe it is John Sullivan primarily because facial features do not appear to agree and because the body is under 6 feet tall. Mr. Sullivan was 6 feet 2 inches tall.

The Sullivan family do not believe that enough is being done by the U.S. Government to locate their son. They have no confidence in the ability of the Salvadoran Government to conduct an investigation into his disappearance and believe that we should conduct it. They believe that the U.S. Government sent a team to El Salvador to investigate the murder of the nuns and that we should do the same for their son. The purpose in sending the team was, of course, to analyze the capability of Salvadoran authorites to investigate these murders and to offer all appropriate technical assistance.

The family alleges that the White House has failed to take an interest in their son's disappearance since they have not apparently been able to discuss their case with anyone there. Each time they have been referred to the State Department. This, of course, is appropriate and does not reflect disinterest on the part of the White House. The family

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has also generated a letter campaign presumably to keep the disappearance of their son "up front". We have received over approximately 400 letters to date. Those from the White House, Congress and family members are being answered by EMR; the others are being answered by the Department's Bureau of Public Affairs.

Insofar as the U.S. Government is concerned, we believe all is being done that can be done. It is possible, however, that the Sullivan family may want to speak with Secretary Haig. If so, I will prepare a briefing memorandum for you to the Secretary for your approval.

It has just been brought to our attention by Congresswoman Roukema's office that "Hustler" Magazine sent a second investigative reporter (Richard Lewis) to San Salvador to investigate the disappearance of John Sullivan. The family had knowledge of this and apparently chose not to share this information with us. As you know, they have also chosen not to divulge the identity of the Salvadoran in New York who they claim maintains that John Sullivan is being held by local authorities. The "Hustler" reporter has returned to the U.S. and we shall attempt to contact him in order to obtain whatever written statement he may wish to make regarding his efforts to locate John Sullivan.

TALKING POINTS

-- We have assured the Sullivan family that the Embassy continues to express strong interest in this case with the Salvadoran authorities. The Embassy has received a written report from the Salvadoran authorities outlining their actions and findings to date. A copy of this report in Spanish has just been received by telegram and an unofficial translation of it is attached. You may wish to present it to the Sullivan family (Tab 2). These actions include:

1. Sending a team of detectives to the hotel to investigate.

2. Distributing photos of Sullivan to all police and other security forces.

3. Checked all hotels in San Salvador.

4. All police units alerted to report on characteristics of all unidentified dead found in their jurisdiction.

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5. The Director General of Immigration has been alerted to report any information regarding Mr. Sullivan.

6. Hospitals and health centers have been checked without results.

7. A nationwide alert, including all the information available on Mr. Sullivan, has been sent to all the national police headquarters countrywide.

-- You should be alerted to the fact that the Sullivan family allegedly spoke with Salvaldoran Ambassador Aquino who allegedly promised to wire El Salvador regarding their son. They claim not to have heard from Ambassador Aquino and that in subsequent attempts to do so, they were not permitted to speak with him. They may well ask you for assistance in reaching Ambassador Aquino.

-- The Sullivan's claim to have talked to a reporter (identity not given) who said that on the day their son checked into his hotel (Dec. 28) the floor on which he was staying was loaded with El Salvador security types. The Sullivan's want to know if this is true and why were they there and shouldn't their presence have made us a bit suspicious. We know of no reason for their presence and cannot confirm or deny this allegation.

-- The Sullivan family want to know if we can contact flight personnel and other passengers on board the flight to El Salvador in the hopes that we might be able to develop something useful in the investigation. We have obtained the manifest and have given copies to the Salvadoran authorities. The manifest gives only names of passengers and no other useful information apart from the boarding pass number, the I.D. number of the travel agent where the ticket was purchased, and the number and the weight of checked baggage.

-- The Sullivan's asked if the International Red Cross in El Salvador is aware of their son's disappearance. The answer is yes, but they have reported nothing.

Attachments:

Tab 1. Letter to Congresswoman Marge Roukema dated February 2, 1981.

Tab 2. Local Report on Disappearance of John Sullivan.

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FEBRUARY 2 1981

Dear Mrs. Boukema:

I refer to your letter of January 14 addressed to former Secretary Muskie, and your letter of January 26 addressed to Secretary Haig concerning the disappearance in El Salvador of Mr. John J. Sullivan. I understand that Mr. Dan Yeager of your staff has been in regular contact with the Department's Citizens Emergency Center concerning Mr. Sullivan's disappearance and that you are already aware of most of the developments in this case. Nevertheless, I shall recapitulate what action has been taken to date in our efforts to locate Mr. Sullivan and I shall try and answer those questions posed in your letters.

As you know, Mr. Sullivan traveled to El Salvador on December 28, 1980, on board TACA airlines and checked into the San Salvador Sheraton Hotel the same day. The Embassy first became aware of the possible disappearance of Mr. Sullivan late Sunday night, January 4, when the Sheraton Hotel Manager, Mr. Peter Dumas, requested Colonel Bosch, the Embassy's Defense Attache who was residing at that time in the hotel, to go to Mr. Sullivan's room to look at his effects. A hotel maid had apparently alerted Mr. Dumas to the fact that Mr. Sullivan had not been using his room. After inspecting Mr. Sullivan's room, Colonel Bosch telephoned Mr. Howard Lane, Embassy's Public Affairs Officer, at 11:30 p.m. to ask if he knew anything about Mr. Sullivan. This telephone call was made from Mr. Sullivan's room. The Public Affairs Officer was called since it was apparent to Colonel Bosch from the effects in the room that Mr. Sullivan was a journalist. Mr. Lane knew nothing of Mr. Sullivan and told Colonel Bosch that he would go to the Press Secretary in the Foreign Office the following morning, January 5, to inquire about him. In addition, Mr. Lane contacted Salvadoran press officials on January 5 and they in turn made inquiries about Mr. Sullivan with the immigration officials. The Public Affairs Officer spent most of that day trying to find some clue to Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts.

The Honorable
Marge Boukema,
House of Representatives.

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On the morning of January 6, 1981, the Public Affairs Officer advised the Consular Section of the Embassy of Mr. Sullivan's presumed disappearance. The Chief of the Consular Section immediately telephoned and cabled the Citizens Emergency Center in the Department of State and a Department officer located and spoke with Mr. Sullivan's mother, Mrs. John Sullivan, that evening in an effort to determine if the Sullivan family had any knowledge of Mr. Sullivan's whereabouts and, if not, to try to obtain further information about him to assist us in our efforts to try and locate him through the Salvadoran authorities.

To date, the Embassy and the Salvadoran authorities have made extensive efforts to try and locate Mr. Sullivan. Our Embassy personnel have checked local hospitals and prisons, and have interviewed hotel personnel, taxi drivers, waitresses, media representatives, missionaries and airline personnel. In addition, there has been extensive local press coverage in El Salvador, including the publication of Mr. Sullivan's picture and description, as well as radio and television announcements asking for information about him. To date all our efforts to locate him have been unsuccessful.

The Embassy has also been in contact at the highest levels with the Salvadoran Government regarding their efforts to locate Mr. Sullivan. The President of El Salvador has personally assured our Ambassador that Mr. Sullivan is not being held by the Salvadoran authorities and that every effort is being made to determine his whereabouts including the ordering of a nationwide alert to be on the lookout for him.

It is my understanding that the Sullivan family has again suggested that the International Red Cross be requested to physically search prisons in San Salvador to try to locate Mr. Sullivan. While I understand the Sullivan family's reasons for making such a request, it is the considered opinion of our Embassy in El Salvador as well as the responsible officers in the Department of State that such a request would be highly inappropriate and that it would most probably be counterproductive. The Salvadoran Government, at the highest level, has assured us that Mr. Sullivan is not being held by the Government and there appears to be no good reason to question those assurances. Our Embassy has, however, been instructed to ensure that any members of the International Red Cross now in El Salvador are aware Mr. Sullivan is missing, and that any information which might come to their attention regarding his whereabouts be reported to our Embassy immediately.

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You asked the question as to what alternative might be available to avoid a total reliance on Salvadoran authorities in the search for Mr. Sullivan. While it is true that our foreign service posts abroad have neither the authority nor the resources to conduct separate investigations in cases such as this, we do press for full investigation by the host government which has not only the authority but the responsibility and physical resources to investigate such cases. We, of course, provide these authorities with whatever information we are able to gather on the individual and the circumstances of his/her disappearance. There have been cases similar to this in the past where the family or friends have opted to hire the services of a private investigator. I am not certain, given the present circumstances in El Salvador, that this avenue would be either possible or productive. Should the family wish to consider this alternative we will be happy to have the Embassy determine whether this is a feasible course of action and, if so, how best to carry it out.

I hope the above information adequately answers your questions about the efforts our Embassy has taken thus far. and that this information will be helpful to you in your dealings with the Sullivan family.

Sincerely,

Walter L. Cutler
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

bcc: S/S-S-MMorris

CA/OCS/EMR-RMWinge
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Ltr. to Sec. Haig
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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

memorandum

DATE: January 16, 1981

REPLY TO ATTN OF: CA/OCS/EMR - Russell W. Winge

SUBJECT: Secretary of State Muskie's Alleged Conversation With Members of the Sullivan Family

TO: CA/OCS/EMR - Files

REF: Memorandum dated January 13; Telcon with Ms. Donna Igoe

On January 14, Mr. Lou Giamporcaro learned from the Sullivan family that Sec. of State Muskie allegedly offered to telephone directly President Duarte in El Salvador to discuss the disappearance of John Sullivan. My efforts to verify the substance of Sec. Muskie's conversation with the Sullivan family through the Salvardoran Desk were fruitless.

On January 15, at the suggestion of Mr. Goelz, I unsuccessfully attempted to contact a staff aide in the Secretary's office. Instead, I spoke directly with Mr. Muskie's secretary and she informed me that according to Mrs. Muskie, who was present in the office, that the Secretary did indeed have a telephone conversation with the Sullivan family on the evening of Jan. 13, presumably from his home, and that he had taken notes regarding the substances of his conversation. Mr. Muskie's secretary stated that a Memorandum of Conversation would be prepared from those notes and that a copy would be provided to my office on the morning of January 16.

At approximately 11:00 on Jan. 16, Mr. Muskie's secretary telephoned to inform me that the Secretary had said that there was nothing in the notes of substance or of interest to me, and that he had made no promises whatsoever to the Sullivan family.

This information is diametrically opposed to that given by the Sullivan family who claim that the Secretary offered to communicate directly by telephone with the President of El Salvador regarding the disappearance of John Sullivan.

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